July 2000 (revised edition)

Fatigue in Air Traffic Controllers: Literature Review

Transport Canada
Transportation Development Centre

Fatigue in Air Traffic Controllers: Literature Review

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Transport Canada Air Navigation Services and Airspace

by

Isabelle Marcil Alex Vincent

Transportation Development Centre Transport Canada This report reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Transportation Development Centre.

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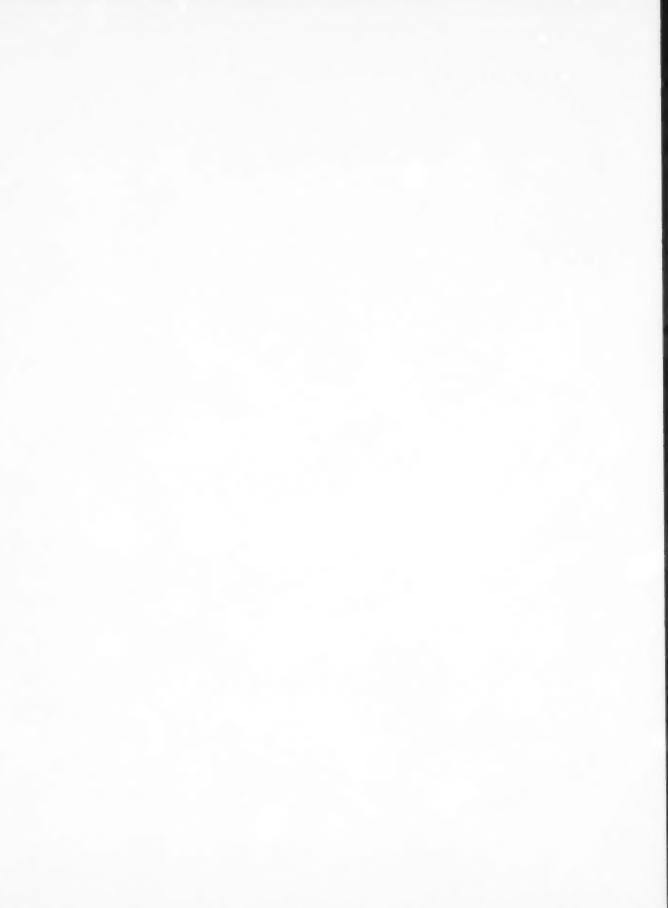
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1 INTRODUCTION

Air traffic controllers (ATCs) often experience fatigue on the job due to shiftwork, workload, and stress. Until now, no critical incident has been directly attributed to fatigue, but fatigue is a factor that cannot be easily assessed after the occurrence of an incident. Still, Roske-Hofstrand (1995) observes that 21% of reported incidents in the Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS) mention factors related to fatigue (for both pilots and ATCs). The impairment of ATC performance due to fatigue is thus an important concern for system safety and requires the development of countermeasures. The goal of this document is to review the research literature on fatigue among ATCs and to present recommendations with respect to potentially viable countermeasures to reduce the impact of fatigue in air traffic control operations.



2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Sources of Fatigue Among ATCs

Fatigue among ATCs originates from various sources. Roske-Hofstrand (1995), after consulting the ASRS, categorized types of fatigue mentioned by ATCs: physical fatigue (related to lack of sleep and sluggishness at start of a shift); shift/schedules-related fatigue; end of shift and workload fatigue (related to high and low workload, and time on duty); and emotional stress (lack of sleep related to problems with supervisors, co-workers, etc.). Not all authors would agree on this typology; still, a lot of attention has been focussed on fatigue caused by shiftwork, schedules, workload and time on task, and also on factors influencing resistance and vulnerability to fatigue. The following sections describe current, related literature.

2.2 Shiftwork and Schedules

2.2.1 Shiftwork

Many airports have 24-hour-a-day air traffic control operational requirements, thereby requiring some controllers to work overnight. Shiftwork has the potential to disrupt the circadian rhythms of the body and sometimes impair work performance, raising concerns for the safe operation of air traffic control systems (Costa, 1999; Meyer, 1973). In the literature on air traffic control, a great deal of attention has focussed on how shiftwork and schedules result in fatigue, and on how they affect performance, sleep, mood, and health. Authors investigating fatigue among ATCs find that fatigue related to shiftwork is twofold: 1) ATCs working at night are at the nadir of their circadian rhythms, which results in fatigue, sleepiness, and performance decrements; 2) shift schedules often create sleep debt, which reduces alertness and performance, particularly during night shifts and at the beginning of early morning shifts.

The night shift is obviously an important cause of concern when considering shiftwork. Many studies observed that ATCs reported more sleepiness during the night shift, compared to day or evening shifts (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco and Cruz, 1995a; Grandjean et al., 1971; Rhodes et al., 1994; Rhodes et al., 1996), peaking in the early morning hours in some cases (Costa, 1999; Luna, 1997). Low traffic load occurring during night shift contributes to increased fatigue and sleepiness in ATCs (Luna, 1997; Wickens, Mavor, and McGee, 1997). Other authors mentioned that ATCs were experiencing more fatigue, less vigour, and more confusion as the night shift progresses (Costa, 1993; Luna, French, and Mitcha, 1997; Luna, French, Mitcha, and Neville, 1994; Melton, 1985; Saldivar, Hoffman, and Melton, 1977). Luna et al. (1997; 1994) measured activity level for controllers using an actigraph (a monitor recording physical activity) and observed an average of 85 minutes of sleep during night shifts (including naps during breaks), a result three times greater than sleep measured during day and evening shifts. By observing electroencephalogram (EEG) patterns of ATCs

working midnight shifts, Rhodes et al. (1996) found corroborating observations of microsleeps and periods of inattention, showing that ATCs had more "difficulty remaining alert during midnight shifts" (p. viii).

The sleepiness and fatigue reported by ATCs can be attributed to the circadian trough occurring at night, but also to sleep deprivation and its associated sleep debt. For the shiftworker, night shifts entail sleeping during the day. Again, because of circadian rhythms, and also because of the diurnal orientation of social life, ATCs working at night get the shortest amount and poorest quality of sleep. Many studies consistently show shortened sleep before a night shift, a phenomenon observed with the use of sleep logs and sleep lab measures (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco and Cruz, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz, and Schroeder, 1995; Melton, 1985; Rhodes et al., 1994; Rhodes et al., 1996; Saldivar et al., 1977; Schroeder, Rosa, and Witt, 1995; Stoynev and Minkova, 1998). Also, the quality of sleep ATCs get before a night shift is poor compared to sleep before a day or evening shift, according to subjective reports of ATCs and results obtained with sleep lab measures. In a study by Della Rocco and Cruz (1995b), ATCs rated the sleep before the night shift as the poorest of their schedule. Rhodes et al. (1994) obtained a similar result through a survey of Canadian ATCs and observed corroborating sleep lab measures. In another study from Rhodes et al. (1996), polysomnographic data showed lesser quality sleep for ATCs working night shift and also sleep patterns usual for individuals suffering from sleep deprivation. Comparing physiological indices of stress, Melton, McKenzie, Polis, et al. (1973) noted that day sleep of ATCs was less restful than night sleep. Only Stoyney and Minkova (1998) measured subjective quality of sleep of ATCs and did not observe differences among the three shift types.

Fatigue, sleepiness, circadian trough, sleep deprivation, low traffic load, and low lighting levels were all identified as factors contributing to decreased performance and vigilance at night (Benson, 1970; Costa, 1993; Costa, 1999; Grandjean et al., 1971; Luna, 1997; Rhodes, et al., 1996; Wickens et al., 1997). Studies indicate that the performance decrements on various tests related to air traffic control tasks are particularly pronounced at the end of the night shift (Della Rocco and Cruz 1996; Della Rocco, Cruz, and Schroeder, 1995; Luna, 1997; Rhodes et al., 1994; Rhodes et al., 1996; Schroeder et al., 1995). However, a few of these authors note that, if the decrement reflects the fatigue influence, the performance on these tests might not be parallel to the operational performance of ATCs (Luna, 1997; Rhodes et al., 1994; Schroeder et al., 1995). Still, operational performance is probably affected by fatigue, since more incidents have been observed at night among other groups of workers (Costa, 1999). Considering the potential consequences of errors in ATC tasks, the performance decrements observed during the night shift raise serious concerns about operational safety.

While there is concern about night shifts, day shifts also have their problems. ATCs experience more fatigue before a day shift compared to the evening shift (Melton,

1985). Working day shift entails sleep loss because ATCs do not go to sleep earlier at night before working an early day shift, and get less sleep in the morning (compared to evening shift and days off) due to early rise (Costa, 1999; Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz, and Schroeder, 1995; Rhodes et al., 1994, 1996; Saldivar et al., 1977). This situation is exacerbated for the numerous controllers who have a long commuting distance. For example, controllers working in the greater Toronto area often have over an hour of driving to get to work, compared to 10 to 15 minutes for ATCs working in Moncton or Gander (Rhodes et al., 1996). Shiftworkers have difficulties compensating for early rise by going to sleep earlier, because there is a period before usual sleep onset when the biological clock seems to prevent sleep (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995a; Folkard and Barton, 1993).

Compared to performance later in the day, early day shift performance is decreased (Rhodes et al., 1996). Considering the higher frequency of accidents during early morning shifts among other groups of workers (Costa, 1999), operational safety is probably threatened by fatigue and performance decrements experienced at the start of early morning shifts.

2.2.2 Schedules

In addition to the problems inherent in night and day shifts, scheduling the shifts also introduces difficulties. Scheduling is, in fact, a highly emotional topic that creates much tension between air traffic control management and employees (Hopkin, 1982, 1995; Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986). The debate over scheduling issues has been around for almost three decades and a completely satisfactory solution remains elusive.

Table 1 Examples of shift schedules used in air traffic control facilities

Schedule	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Permanent sc	hedule:						
Week 1: 5 days	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500		
Week 2: 5 days	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	off	off
Week 3: 5 days	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500		
Slow rotation:							
Week 1: 5 days	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500	700-1500		
Week 2: 5 evenings	1500-2300	1500-2300	1500-2300	1500-2300	1500-2300	off	off
Week 3: 5 nights	2300-700	2300-700	2300-700	2300-700	2300-700		
Rapid rotation	1:						
Counterclockwise	1500-2300	1500-2300	700-1500	700-1500		off	off
					2300-700		
Clockwise	700-1500	700-1500	1500-2300	1500-2300	2300-700	off	off

As can be seen in **Table 1**, various types of shift schedules exist to cover the 24-hour period of operations in air traffic control facilities. **Permanent schedules** involve always working the same shift. The **slow rotation schedule**, a variation of the permanent schedule, involves working five straight days on a specific shift, then rotating to another shift the following week. Other schedules imply **rapid rotation** of shifts during the week. Although the exact configuration may vary, two main kinds of rapid rotation schedules exist: 1) clockwise rotation, and 2) counterclockwise rotation. In the **clockwise rotation** (also called forward or delayed rotation), the work week starts with a day shift, rotating later in the week to an afternoon shift, and finally changing to a night shift. In the **counterclockwise** (backward or advancing rotation), the work week starts with an afternoon shift, then advances to an early day shift, to finally end with a night shift (Luna, 1997; Tepas and Monk, 1987). In **Table 1**, two days off are represented as the weekend, a common situation for ATCs working in the United States.

In Canada, the schedules differ from those used in the United States. The 1999 collective agreement between Nav Canada and the Canadian Air Traffic Control Association (CATCA) established four types of schedule cycles detailed in **Table 2**. According to the agreement, the rest period must be not less than three consecutive days. The agreement also states that each shift should not begin "within 10 hours of the completion of the employee's previous shift" and that a regular shift should not exceed 11 hours (CATCA/Nav Canada, 1999).1

Table 2 Schedule cycles of Canadian air traffic controllers

	Schedule #1	Schedule #2	Schedule #3	Schedule #4
First week	6 days on - 4 days off	6 days on - 4 days off	6 days on - 5 days off	6 days on - 3 days off
Second week	6 days on - 4 days off	6 days on - 3 days off	6 days on - 3 days off	6 days on - 3 days off
Third week	5 days on - 3 days off	5 days on - 4 days off	5 days on - 3 days off	5 days on - 5 days off

In air traffic control facilities, various types of schedules exist, including five straight days (rotation of shift from one week to another) and a rapid backward rotation referred to as the 2-2-1. These schedules have been studied and also compared in terms of fatigue, sleep, performance, and stress. These studies are often difficult to conduct and they meet with many methodological difficulties leading to limited statistical analyses associated with small sample sizes and non-equivalent groups or shifts. Nevertheless, the accumulation of data allows us to note some consistent pattern in the results across studies and it is observed that each schedule, as will be reported below, has its own particular weaknesses.

Other articles of the Collective Agreement e.g., Overtime, Holidays, and Staffing, may affect actual work schedules. The reader is referred to the Collective Agreement for a more extensive description of conditions influencing work schedules.

The main cause of concern regarding permanent schedules or slow rotations is people working consecutive night shifts. Generally, five consecutive night shifts are thought to allow enough time for the circadian rhythms to adapt to nocturnal life. However, this hypothesis is not supported by research. Studies report that the circadian rhythms of night workers in varying operation domains tend to desynchronize and never adjust completely to night work, even after working this schedule for prolonged periods (Benson, 1970; Costa, 1999; Luna, 1997; Tepas and Monk, 1987; Wickens et al., 1997). Working consecutive night shifts is also a major inconvenience in the social life of shiftworkers, and they tend to go back to diurnal life on their time off, hindering the adaptation process (Luna, 1997; Tepas and Monk, 1987).

Consecutive night shifts have another drawback, as observed by Rhodes et al., (1996). In their study, they observed that ATCs working five consecutive night shifts accumulated a sleep debt of more than 10 hours due to a low average of daytime sleep and poor sleep quality. The melatonin levels of these ATCs indicated that their circadian rhythms never adopted a nocturnal pattern. Melton and Bartanowicz (1986) similarly concluded that five consecutive night shifts are not enough to adapt circadian rhythms to a nocturnal pattern, resulting in accumulated fatigue because of inadequate sleep during the day. Moreover, controllers working five consecutive nights report that they need the complete weekend to make up for the loss of sleep, and they tend to go back to work tired at the beginning of the following week (Melton, McKenzie, Smith, et al. 1973; Saldivar et al., 1977). Even if consecutive night shifts allowed adaptation to circadian rhythms, ATCs still experience too many inconveniences, such as loss of proficiency related to low traffic volume at night (Luna, 1997; Luna et al, 1994, 1997; Melton, 1985; Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986); boredom, which creates fatigue and eventually leads to low motivation (Luna et al., 1994); and reduced social contact with family, friends, and colleagues (Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986; Rhodes et al, 1994; Wickens et al., 1997).

As opposed to permanent schedules and slow rotation, during rapidly rotating shifts, individuals keep diurnal circadian rhythms, as can be measured by body temperature, melatonin levels, or arterial pressure (Costa, 1993; Luna et al., 1994; Rhodes et al., 1996; Stoynev, Minkova, 1998). Maintaining a diurnal cycle prevents desynchronization between various biological circadian rhythms, and ATCs are at the peak of their circadian rhythms during the day and afternoon shifts when there is an increase in traffic.

In studies pertaining to rotating schedules of ATCs, the 2-2-1 counterclockwise rotation schedule received a lot of attention. The exact configuration of this schedule varies, but it usually involves working two evening shifts, rotating to work two day shifts, followed by a single night shift. This schedule presents the advantage of working only one night shift compared to the consecutive five night shift schedule, a feature appreciated by many ATCs (Schroeder et al., 1995). However, compared to the usual 16 hours off between two consecutive straight shifts, time off on counterclockwise rotation ranges

from 14 to 8 hours. Regarding the fatigue issue, these short rest periods raise questions about whether ATCs get enough sleep between their shifts to fully recover. A lack of complete recovery can affect performance.

Research focussing on the sleep of ATCs working 2-2-1 schedules found a constant decline in the quantity of sleep during the work week (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco and Cruz, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz, and Schroeder, 1995; Melton, 1985; Melton et al., 1975; Melton, McKenzie, Smith, et al., 1973; Rhodes et al., 1996; Saldivar et al., 1977; Schroeder et al., 1995). This decline is easily explained by the early rise for the day shift, the quick turnaround, and the short day sleep obtained before the night shift (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco and Cruz, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz, and Schroeder, 1995; Rhodes et al., 1996; Saldivar et al., 1977; Schroeder et al., 1995). As discussed earlier, sleep before night shifts is reduced and poor, a condition exacerbated for a 2-2-1 schedule where ATCs get less sleep before the night shift compared to the sleep obtained before consecutive night shifts (Melton, et al., 1975; Melton, McKenzie, Smith, et al., 1973; Saldivar et al., 1977). According to Melton, McKenzie, Smith, et al. (1973), some ATCs on a 2-2-1 schedule prefer to take a brief nap prior to a night shift to be just tired enough in the morning to sleep well and readjust to normal day life.

Does the 2-2-1 schedule create more problems related to sleep loss, fatigue, and performance? To investigate this question, some researchers compared the 2-2-1 schedule to other types of schedules. Saldivar et al. (1977) compared a five consecutive shift rotation to the 2-2-1 schedule and observed no differences in the amount of fatigue complaints. Over five work days, ATCs got less sleep on the 2-2-1 schedule, mainly because of shortened sleep before the night shift, but the comparison across seven days was not significant. Della Rocco and Cruz (1995b) obtained a similar result in a laboratory study of sleep/wake cycles. In another study, Melton et al. (1975) observed that ATCs on a 2-2-1 pattern got less sleep than their counterparts on five consecutive days, but the differences were mainly due to the night shift, since on the first four days of the week, ATCs on a 2-2-1 schedule got 30 minutes more sleep than ATCs on consecutive day schedules.

In a field study, Cruz and Della Rocco (1995b) compared a 2-2-1 schedule to a straight day schedule and found no significant differences between these schedules in sleep quantity, sleep quality, and sleepiness ratings before and after the shifts. Melton, McKenzie, Smith, et al. (1973) found that ATCs on 2-2-1 got more sleep than those on five night shifts, but less than those on five-day shifts. In this study, ATCs on 2-2-1 schedules experienced less stress, and no difference in fatigue was observed. Compared to a consecutive shift schedule, the shortened rest period on a quick turnaround contributes to reduced sleep (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995a). In this study, the authors observed that the amount of sleep before a morning shift was often less than six hours for all shift rotations, an indication that some ATCs might not be able to get to sleep earlier because of their biological clock.

A few studies have evaluated performance in relation to 2-2-1 schedules and to quick turnaround between shifts. Schroeder et al. (1995) and Della Rocco and Cruz (1995b) observed that performance decrements in 2-2-1 schedules were significant only for night shifts. Rhodes et al. (1996) made a similar observation, but they also noticed that performance was poorer following sleep loss resulting from quick changes.

It is difficult to be categorical about fatigue, sleep loss, and performance in relation to 2-2-1 schedules. As Melton and Bartanowicz (1986) argued, 2-2-1 schedules have the advantage of working four of the five shifts within normal waking hours. However, sleep patterns are disrupted by the changing starting times of this schedule (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b). Some ATCs may cope better than others with this sleep disruption. One important concern about this schedule is the night shift. As stated earlier, ATCs might have some inappropriate sleeping habits before the night shift, but the longer weekend slows for enough recovery time to eliminate the accumulated sleep debt. In the long run, negative effects are possible since it has been reported that older ATCs have more difficulties dealing with 2-2-1 schedules and this schedule is associated with illness indicators (Rhodes et al., 1994).

Until now, a lot of attention has been focussed on consecutive shifts and 2-2-1 backward rotating shifts. Other schedules are possible for air traffic control operations, like the forward rotating schedule where the shiftworker begins the schedule on a day shift, followed by an evening shift, and finally, to a night shift. As with the backward rapid rotation schedule, forward rapid rotation helps maintain a diurnal circadian cycle (Stoynev and Minkova, 1998). Some authors note that, generally, the clockwise rotating schedules are more consistent with the circadian rhythms, and allow more time to rest between shifts, and would thus be preferable to counterclockwise schedules (Costa, 1999; Barton and Folkard, 1993; Luna, 1997; Tepas and Monk, 1987; Wickens et al., 1997). Few studies of forward rapidly rotating schedules among ATCs exist. According to these studies, night shifts are problematic as well on forward rotating schedules because of reduced sleep quantity, fatigue, increased sleepiness, and microsleep periods (Luna et al., 1994; Stoynev and Minkova, 1998). Also, USAF ATCs on a forward 2-2-2 schedule rotation did not sleep or nap before their first night shift, a possible indication that even though this schedule allows more time to sleep between shifts, ATCs might not be taking full advantage of it (Luna, 1997; Luna et al., 1994). Forward rotation schedules may allow more time to rest between shifts, but they reduce the duration of the weekend (Luna, 1997). Since weekends allow time for recovery from the night shift, a shortened weekend increases the probability of tired ATCs returning to work the following week. This kind of rotation is thus unpopular among ATCs, who prefer backward rotation to obtain increased time for the weekend (Melton, 1985; Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986; Schroeder et al., 1995; Wickens et al., 1997). Comparison of forward and backward rotating schedules for ATCs have not been studied at length, and although forward rotating schedules may appear advantageous, this topic requires further study (Luna, 1997; Stoynev and Minkova 1998).

2.3 Workload and Time on Task

Workload is experienced differently from one ATC to another, depending on experience, skills, motivation, tiredness, and also on their coping skills (Hopkin, 1995; Wickens et al., 1997). Still, high workload related to high traffic volume eventually creates fatigue because of the sustained efforts required (Meyer, 1973). The efforts needed to cope with high workload can only be sustained for a certain period of time and they take their toll on performance. During simulated air traffic control tasks, as time passed, lapses in attention occurred more frequently and reaction times increased for complex monitoring tasks, particularly for high task load conditions (Schroeder, et al., 1994; Stern et al., 1994; Thackray and Touchstone, 1985; Thackray, Touchstone, and Bailey, 1978). The performance decrements and fluctuations of alertness associated with time on task are even worse if the operator is suffering from sleep loss or sleep disruption (Meyer, 1973).

The fact that high traffic periods are associated with high workload is obvious. However, low traffic load can also be demanding. Air traffic control tasks involve a lot of monitoring. Sustaining vigilance for prolonged periods of time is demanding and boring and leads to decreased alertness and low motivation (Luna et al., 1994; Schroeder et al., 1994; Wickens et al., 1997). This has been confirmed by subjective ratings of participants who reported increasing tiredness, boredom, and irritation (Schroeder et al., 1994).

2.4 Workload and Automation

Worldwide air traffic is growing rapidly, putting more pressure on ATCs and increasing their workload. With the development of new technologies, increasing automation in the air traffic control environment has often been considered as a strategy to reduce workload of ATCs and increase traffic capacity of airports (Hopkin, 1995, 1999; Wickens et al., 1997). However, the possible consequences of automation on cognitive processes and ATC performance are not well known (FAA, 1990; Garland, Stein, Muller, 1999). It is often stated that automation of some functions reduces the role of an ATC to a monitoring one (Thackray and Touchstone, 1985; Thackray et al., 1978). Such changes do not necessarily reduce ATC workload, since vigilance tasks are demanding, and fatigue may arise from sustained attention (Hopkin, 1995; Stern et al., 1994; Wickens et al., 1997). Gaines (1993) also noted that reducing the work of ATCs to a monitoring role could result in their "losing the art of controlling" (p.17). Automation can also add to the ATC workload by demanding "increased knowledge and mental effort to understand and interpret system dynamics and outcomes" (FAA, 1990, p. A-57). Thus, automation of the air traffic control environment needs to be carefully evaluated and planned to be fully beneficial.

2.5 Lifestyles, Personality Characteristics, and Individual Differences

Some lifestyle elements have been shown to influence how a person deals with fatigue. For example, ATCs who have healthy habits such as exercising, a balanced diet, good sleep hygiene, and good time management strategies cope more effectively with fatigue (Costa, 1999; Meyer, 1973; Rhodes et al., 1994). It seems that physical fitness reduces fatigue and increases performance on night shifts (Costa, 1999). In contrast, ATC who smoke, who drink too much alcohol and coffee, and who take medication to go to sleep show more illness indicators (Rhodes et al., 1994).

Coping with shiftwork, fatigue, and stress becomes increasingly difficult with age, mainly because older ATCs are less resistant to stress, get less sleep, and their circadian rhythms are more easily disrupted by unstable sleep patterns (Costa, 1999; Costa et al., 1995; Meyer, 1973; Rhodes et al., 1994; Rhodes et al., 1996). While differences exist in relation to age, circadian rhythms are not different for men or women; they are equally vulnerable to fatigue (Costa, 1999).

Personality characteristics and behavioural aspects also influence the impact of fatigue on individuals. Whether ATCs are morning or evening types can influence performance and adaptation to shifts. Morning types prefer to get up early and go to bed early at night, while evening types prefer the opposite. Accordingly, morning-type ATCs have more difficulty coping with night work, but they cope more easily with early morning hours, while evening types, as can be expected, cope more easily with evening and night shifts (Costa, 1999; Costa et al., 1995; Rhodes et al., 1994). Overall, evening types cope better with shiftwork since they show less sleep disruption with shiftwork and also lowered levels in physiological indicators associated with stress (Costa, 1993, 1999). ATCs who have stable circadian rhythms are better able to resist sleep disruptions and experience less fatigue, while those who have rigid sleep habits or are unable to overcome drowsiness, are more vulnerable to fatigue (Costa, 1993; 1999).



3 POTENTIAL COUNTERMEASURES

From the findings described in the previous sections, certain suggestions and recommendations can be made to address the fatigue issue. The measures discussed in the following section include ways to improve alertness during the night shift, training programs on sleep strategies and shiftwork coping, recommendations about shifts and scheduling, and suggestions for increasing automation of the air traffic control environment.

3.1 Increasing Alertness During Night Shifts

Fatigue, sleepiness, and decreased performance on night shifts can be addressed in different ways. Measures oriented toward improving alertness during the night shift could be implemented. Such measures include better lighting of the work site (Costa, 1999; Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b; Luna, 1997; Luna et al., 1994). The current low ambient illumination contributes to reduced alertness (Luna, 1997; Rhodes et al., 1996). Bright lights help maintain alertness and postpone sleep (Costa, 1999; Luna et al., 1994) while improving vigilance levels (Boivin, 1997). Proper care should be taken to find an adequate level of illumination to allow for easy monitoring of radar screens (Luna, 1997; Hopkin, 1995; Rhodes et al., 1996).

Another strategy geared to increase alertness is napping. Many authors suggest that napping, either before or during the shift, helps prevent sleepiness and preserve alertness through the night shift (Costa, 1993; 1999; Luna, 1997; Luna et al., 1994). Napping in the context of air traffic control operations has not received much attention until recently, but some researchers have become interested in this area. Rhodes et al. (1996) noted the benefits of naps and recommended that napping should be studied in a simulated air traffic control work environment to fully evaluate the effects on alertness and performance. Della Rocco, Cruz, and Schroeder (1995) were planning to investigate the effectiveness of napping on the night shift. In suggesting naps as a means of improving alertness during night shifts, Luna (1997) observed that such a strategy raises the problem of sleep inertia, a transition period where the individual is still sleepy and not completely functional. This issue can be solved by proper timing of naps (before shifts) and by allowing enough time for recovery following a nap.

Several authors suggest that taking melatonin could be helpful for ATCs in coping with night shifts. Melatonin is a pineal hormone thought to be involved in the regulation of sleep and wakefulness (Sanders, Chaturvedi, and Hordinsky, 1998). The ingestion of melatonin prior to sleep helps sleep onset and improves sleep quality while reducing subsequent fatigue and sleepiness (Costa, 1999). Melatonin is a powerful resynchronizer of circadian rhythms and contributes to increased performance of night workers (Luna, 1997). It might be helpful for ATCs working consecutive night shifts, but could have detrimental effects for those working rapid rotation schedules, which are precisely aimed at preventing a phase shift of the circadian cycle (Luna, 1997). There is also the

possible risk of residual effects that may cause sleepiness and performance impairment. The administration of melatonin at the right time therefore seems critical for ATCs on shiftwork (Sanders et al., 1998). Although it might look promising as a strategy against fatigue, interest in melatonin is rather recent and there is still much to learn about its efficacy, side effects, and long-term effects on health, as well as its interaction with other medication (Sanders et al., 1998).

Other possible strategies exist to help maintain alertness during night shifts. Drinking coffee, a common strategy, helps maintain alertness and performance, and if taken early enough during the shift, does not disturb sleep onset at the end of the shift (Luna, 1997; Luna, et al., 1994). One should not drink too much coffee, however, because of its negative effects on the digestive system (Costa, 1999). As stated earlier, low traffic levels are frequent during night shifts, demanding high vigilance from ATCs, contributing to boredom and fatigue (Rhodes et al., 1996). A possible solution would be to keep ATCs busy, possibly with simulated traffic operations, as long as that does not interfere with normal operations (Rhodes et al., 1996). Other strategies could consist of exercising on the job with a stationary bicycle or rowing machine, or just engaging in conversation or simple games with colleagues (Luna, 1997; Luna et al., 1994).

3.2 Education

Many ATCs may have improper sleep strategies and may not take full advantage of their time off to rest (Melton, McKenzie, Smith, et al., 1973; Rhodes et al., 1996; Saldivar et al., 1977). Some ATCs on a 2-2-1 schedule prefer just to take a short nap before a night shift to be tired enough to sleep in the morning, while others, before their day shift, go to bed late at night (especially after an evening shift), even though they have to get up early. Sleep loss and fatigue result from these habit. Shiftwork can not be eliminated, so, obviously, better coping strategies should be promoted. As Roske-Hofstrand (1995) stated, there is a need to raise the awareness of staff and supervisors about the fatigue problems among ATCs, since it is too often considered a personal problem rather than a job-related hazard.

Developing training programs on shiftwork countermeasures and on sleep hygiene for ATCs and management could at the same time raise awareness about fatigue and help reduce fatigue by teaching appropriate coping strategies (Della Rocco and Cruz, 1995b; Della Rocco and Cruz, 1996; Della Rocco, Cruz, and Schroeder, 1995; Rhodes et al., 1996). Rhodes et al. (1996) suggest including family members of ATCs in sleep hygiene training to sensitize them to the fatigue problem. One of the important topics to be considered is appropriate sleep strategies: how to create a good environment to sleep, appropriate habits prior to sleeping, appropriate sleeping times of the day, and helpful relaxation techniques before sleeping (Rhodes et al., 1996). This training would also represent a good opportunity to emphasize the importance of healthy habits such as a healthy diet and exercising, and to explain the effects of alcohol and medication. The training could also include information on other topics related to fatigue, such as the

effects of circadian rhythms, influence of individual characteristics on the ability to cope with shiftwork (age, morning/evening types, stability of circadian rhythms), and workload management strategies (Gaines, 1993).

3.3 Reducing Fatigue Problems Related to Sleep Loss

Early morning shifts induce sleep loss. ATCs have to get up earlier, while not being able to go to bed earlier because of their biological clock (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995a; Folkard and Barton, 1993). It might be useful to reschedule the day shift to start later in the morning to avoid shortened sleep before the shift (Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995a; Cruz and Della Rocco, 1995b). Some air traffic control facilities do not operate at night but start early in the morning. Accordingly, it might not be possible for them to start activities later. Also, starting later in the morning entails prolonging the night shift, and thus having tired staff handling the morning rush hour. Alternatively, it can mean that hand-over of traffic from one group to another occurs during peak traffic, possibly increasing operating risks considering that incidents happen more often at the beginning of shifts when ATCs are developing a portrait of the traffic situation (Stager and Hameluck, 1988). Another possible avenue would be to revise the scheduling of the work system, which might not be an easy task (see section 3.4).

3.4 Rescheduling

Scheduling the shifts for air traffic control operations is an emotionally charged issue where staff and management do not always share the same point of view (Hopkin, 1982). Debates over proper schedules have been going on since the early 1970s and scheduling is still an unresolved issue (Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986). Research does not indicate a clear direction either; some results are contradictory and these studies often have methodological problems. Still, certain patterns in the results suggest some guidelines with respect to scheduling.

Considering the data reviewed in previous sections on permanent shift schedules and slow rotation, these schedules have few positive aspects for night shifts and many disadvantages for performance and safe operations. The reason this kind of schedule is used in air traffic control facilities should be questioned regarding safe operations, and evidence suggests considering other types of schedules for ATCs. Considering fatigue, sleep loss, disruption of circadian rhythms, loss of proficiency related to low traffic, and reduced social interaction, the number of consecutive night shifts should be reduced as much as staffing allows (Costa, 1999; Hopkin, 1995; Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986; Rhodes et al., 1994; Rhodes et al., 1996; Wickens et al., 1997).

Rapid rotating schedules are alternatives to the previous permanent or slow rotating schedules. They involve working fewer night shifts, only one or two at the end of the week. Such schedules, the 2-2-1 backward rotation in particular, have inconveniences; they compress the work week and reduce time off between shifts, particularly with a

quick turnaround, resulting in sleep loss and performance decrements (Della Rocco and Cruz, 1995b; Rhodes et al., 1996; Schroeder et al., 1995). Any strategy geared to reducing sleep loss and increasing alertness would be advisable for this schedule. While some authors argue that clockwise schedules are preferable to counterclockwise to allow more time to rest between shifts, Cruz and Della Rocco (1995a) observed that the direction of the rotation might not be as important as the scheduled time off between shifts. Thus, redesigning schedules to allow longer rest periods, 10 to 13 hours instead of 8 hours on the quick turnaround, would reduce sleep loss and improve performance.

The direction of the rotation is a delicate matter. Clockwise rotation would be preferable to counterclockwise because of the dynamics of the circadian cycle (Costa, 1999; Luna, 1997; Tepas and Monk, 1987). However, these schedules compress the weekend, an unpopular consequence for most ATCs. In reality, very few clockwise rotation schedules exist (Luna, 1997; Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986). If clockwise rotations were considered, for ATCs to accept them, it would be necessary to find a way to keep a reasonable time off for the weekend period (Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986).

As the preceding idea suggests, many ATCs appreciate counterclockwise rotations because of extended weekends (Luna, 1997; Melton, 1985; Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986; Hopkin, 1982, 1995; Wickens et al., 1997). Still, as observed by Della Rocco and Cruz (1995b), some ATCs resent counterclockwise schedules like the 2-2-1, possibly because they cope less effectively than others with changing sleep patterns and sleep loss. This suggests that, when possible, work systems should include different schedules to fit individual ATC preferences. Some authors argue that ATCs should be consulted and should have some control over the assignment of schedules. It is a matter of job satisfaction: ATCs are more motivated and more able to cope with the fatigue and stress related to a schedule they have chosen (Hopkin, 1982, 1995; Melton, 1985; Melton and Bartanowicz, 1986; Meyer, 1973). In fact, Hopkin (1982) noted that some ATCs will adapt to any schedule as long as it is "acceptable" to them. Thus, in the process of designing and assigning schedules, all previously mentioned considerations regarding sleep, circadian rhythms, and health are important. Melton and Bartanowicz (1986) made some convincing recommendations, suggesting that in designing schedules, operational requirements and safety must come first and schedules should be reasonable and manageable, an idea promoted as well by Hopkin (1995) and by Wickens et al. (1997). After that, employees' desires and needs can be taken into account. When this is possible, the work environment can be more pleasant and less stressful, with less tension between management and staff.

A related topic to scheduling concerns breaks. While they work, ATCs should take breaks. As discussed earlier, their tasks require sustained vigilance. Since vigilance decreases over time while feelings of fatigue increase, a break every two hours of continuous work should be allowed (Hopkin, 1995; Roske-Hofstrand, 1995). During their breaks, ATCs should have time to walk away from their station, go to the bathroom, spend time in relaxation facilities at the workplace, where they can have

something to drink or chat with colleagues (Hopkin, 1995; Meyer, 1973; Roske-Hofstrand, 1995). Taking a break is very important during night shifts since low traffic levels induce fatigue resulting from efforts to counter boredom. Unfortunately, too often during night shifts, reduced staff makes it difficult for ATCs to take a break (Rhodes et al., 1994; Roske-Hofstrand, 1995). Staff planning should take breaks into consideration, especially during night shifts (Rhodes et al., 1996).

Other authors suggest that night shifts should include breaks long enough for naps. Costa (1993) studied Italian ATCs on a 1-1-1 backward rotating schedule with a night shift including a four-hour rest period. Apparently, this kind of schedule facilitated psychophysiological adaptation and helped compensate for sleep loss. This is only one example of many possible night shift schedules that would include a break long enough for napping. Break periods could also be shorter for naps of 20-40 minutes. As discussed earlier, research is ongoing to determine the ideal length of a nap. It is important to note that a night shift with a napping break would be longer and would require changes to existing schedules. Prolonging the night shift could allow for a later start in the morning, resolving the problem of sleep loss associated with an early start. Night shifts could be longer; 8 to 10 hours is still an acceptable shift length if periods of standby are included (Hopkin, 1995). However, staff may not appreciate a change to longer shifts and they may resist such a change. Thus, prior to modifying schedules to include longer breaks during night shifts, more information is needed on naps and their frequency within the shift.

3.5 Increasing Automation

Within certain boundaries, automation can be useful to reduce workload. Carefully designed systems would increase the efficiency of the air traffic control system where the human operator "can perform successfully and with satisfaction" (FAA, 1990, p. A-59). New automated systems should be flexible to allow ATCs to choose their level of workload: reduced workload results in boredom, whereas moderate levels of workload are motivating (Hopkin, 1995). Flexible computer aids should focus on data collection, leaving ATCs in charge of more interesting tasks requiring information processing and decision-making (Hopkin, 1995; Wickens et al., 1997). Therefore, new automated systems have important potential benefits for air traffic control operations, but their impact and usability by human operators should be carefully evaluated (Cabon et al., 1997).



4 CONCLUSION

This report has reviewed the research literature on fatigue among ATCs. It appears that night shifts, shiftwork, and workload are important variables related to fatigue in ATCs. Automation and personal characteristics can also influence their experience of fatigue. Some potential countermeasures have been discussed. They include ways to increase alertness during the night shifts, topics for health training programs for ATCs, means of reducing sleep loss, suggestions for rescheduling shifts to reduce sleep loss and fatigue, and recommendations for future automation of the air traffic control environment.



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La fatigue chez les contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne -Recherche documentaire

Transports Canada Centre de développement des transports

La fatigue chez les contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne Recherche documentaire

Préparé pour

Transports Canada Services de la navigation aérienne et espace aérien

par

Isabelle Marcil Alex Vincent

Centre de développement des transports Transports Canada

Juillet 2000 (édition révisée)

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Les contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne ressentent souvent de la fatigue au travail. Cette fatigue tient essentiellement au travail posté, à la charge de travail et au stress. La baisse de performance causée par la fatique soulève des inquiétudes quant à la sûreté du système de contrôle de la circulation aérienne, d'où l'urgence de mettre en place des contre-mesures pour pallier ce problème. Ce rapport fait l'inventaire des principales causes de la fatique, telles qu'elles se dégagent d'une recherche documentaire, et recommande des contre-mesures possibles au problème. Divers thèmes sont abordés, dont la fatique associée au travail posté et à l'organisation temporelle du travail posté, à la charge de travail et à la durée de la tâche, et à l'automatisation. Les habitudes de vie, la personnalité et les différences interindividuelles, qui font que l'expérience de la fatique varie d'une personne à l'autre, sont également abordées. Au nombre des contre-mesures possibles figurent des méthodes pour accroître la vigilance des contrôleurs en service la nuit, des programmes de formation et de sensibilisation, des stratégies pour atténuer la fatigue associée au manque de sommeil, et des facteurs à prendre en compte dans l'établissement des horaires et l'automatisation de la tâche.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Les contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne ressentent souvent de la fatigue au travail. Cette fatigue tient au travail posté, à la charge de travail et au stress. Il n'est pas encore arrivé qu'un incident grave ait été directement imputé à la fatigue, mais il est difficile de déterminer après coup le rôle de la fatigue dans un incident. Roske-Hofstrand (1995) note tout de même que 21 p. cent des rapports d'incidents versés à l'Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS) font état de facteurs reliés à la fatigue (tant du côté des pilotes que des contrôleurs). La baisse de la performance des contrôleurs due à la fatigue suscite donc des inquiétudes quant à la sûreté du système de contrôle de la circulation aérienne. D'où l'importance de trouver des contre-mesures pour pallier ce problème. Ce rapport fait l'inventaire des principales causes de la fatigue, telles qu'elles se dégagent d'une recherche documentaire, et recommande des contre-mesures possibles pour réduire les effets de la fatigue sur le contrôle de la circulation aérienne.



2 CONTEXTE

2.1 Causes de la fatigue chez les contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne

La fatigue des contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne tient à divers facteurs. Après avoir passé en revue les rapports d'incidents versés au ASRS, Roske-Hofstrand (1995) a dressé une typologie de la fatigue, fondée sur les observations formulées par les contrôleurs. Ainsi, il distingue la fatigue physique (léthargie en début de service associée au manque de sommeil), la fatigue associée au travail posté et à l'organisation temporelle du travail posté, la fatigue de fin de quart, reliée à la charge de travail (induite par une charge de travail trop lourde ou trop légère et par la durée de la tâche); et le stress émotionnel (manque de sommeil associé à des difficultés avec ses supérieurs, ses pairs, etc.). Cette typologie ne rallierait pas tous les chercheurs; mais de nombreuses recherches ont été consacrées à la fatigue due au travail posté, à l'organisation temporelle du travail posté, à la charge de travail et à la durée de la tâche, de même qu'aux facteurs influant sur la résistance et sur la vulnérabilité à la fatigue. On trouvera ci-après un résumé des articles les plus récents publiés sur la question.

2.2 Travail posté et organisation temporelle du travail posté

2.2.1 Travail posté

De nombreux aéroports doivent assurer des services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne 24 heures sur 24, d'où la nécessité pour certains contrôleurs de travailler de nuit. Le travail posté peut perturber le rythme circadien qui régit les fonctions physiologiques et peut même nuire à la performance, ce qui n'est pas sans soulever des inquiétudes quant à la sûreté du système de contrôle de la circulation aérienne (Costa, 1999; Meyer, 1973). Les recherches sur le contrôle de la circulation aérienne ont surtout porté sur les effets du travail posté et des horaires des postes sur la fatigue, la performance, le sommeil, l'humeur et la santé. Les études sur la fatigue chez les contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne ont établi un double lien entre la fatigue et le travail posté : 1) les contrôleurs du service de nuit travaillent pendant le creux de leur rythme circadien, ce qui entraîne de la fatigue, de la somnolence et une baisse de la performance; 2) l'organisation temporelle des postes entraîne souvent un déficit de sommeil, qui entraîne à son tour une baisse de la vigilance et de la performance, surtout pendant le service de nuit et au début du service du matin.

Le quart de nuit est évidemment le plus préoccupant. De nombreux chercheurs ont en effet observé une plus grande propension des contrôleurs à se déclarer somnolents lorsqu'ils travaillent la nuit que lorsqu'ils travaillent le jour ou le soir (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco et Cruz, 1995a; Grandjean et coll., 1971; Rhodes et coll., 1994, 1996); certains ont de plus constaté que c'est aux petites heures du matin que culmine la somnolence (Costa, 1999; Luna, 1997). La charge de travail relativement

faible associée au travail de nuit contribue à la fatigue et à la somnolence (Luna, 1997; Wickens, Mayor et McGee, 1997). Selon d'autres recherches, plus la nuit avance, plus les contrôleurs se sentent fatigués, confus et léthargiques (Costa, 1993; Luna, French et Mitcha, 1997; Luna, French, Mitcha et Neville, 1994; Melton, 1985; Saldivar, Hoffman et Melton, 1977). Luna et coll. (1997, 1994) ont mesuré le degré d'activité des contrôleurs à l'aide d'un actographe (appareil qui enregistre l'activité d'un organisme). Ils ont constaté que les contrôleurs qui travaillaient la nuit dormaient en moyenne 85 minutes (y compris les sommes pris pendant les pauses), soit trois fois plus que les contrôleurs qui travaillaient le jour et le soir. Rhodes et coll. (1996) ont étudié les données électroencéphalographiques (EEG) de contrôleurs travaillant la nuit, lesquelles ont corroboré ces résultats. Ils y ont en effet observé des micro-sommeils et des périodes d'inattention, indices que les contrôleurs «avaient davantage de difficulté à demeurer vigilants pendant le service de minuit» (p. viii).

La somnolence et la fatigue éprouvées par les contrôleurs en service la nuit peuvent être attribuées au fait qu'ils se trouvent alors au creux de leur rythme circadien, mais aussi à la privation de sommeil et au déficit de sommeil qui en découle. Le travailleur posté qui effectue un quart de nuit est forcé de dormir le jour. Mais en raison du rythme circadien et de l'orientation diurne de la vie sociale, les contrôleurs qui travaillent de nuit sont ceux qui dorment le moins et le plus mal. De nombreuses études montrent que le sommeil pris juste avant le service de nuit est écourté, un phénomène qui ressort des registres du sommeil remplis par les contrôleurs et des données colligées en laboratoire (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco et Cruz, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz et Schroeder, 1995; Melton, 1985; Rhodes et coll., 1994, 1996; Saldivar et coll., 1977; Schroeder, Rosa et Witt, 1995; Stoynev et Minkova, 1998). Et, en plus d'être écourté, ce sommeil est de mauvaise qualité, comparé au sommeil précédant un service de jour ou de soir, comme l'ont révélé les commentaires subjectifs des contrôleurs et les mesures prises dans des laboratoires du sommeil. Lors d'une étude réalisée par Della Rocco et Cruz (1995b), des contrôleurs américains ont jugé le sommeil pris avant un quart de nuit comme étant le moins bon de tout le cycle de travail. Rhodes et coll. (1994) ont obtenu des résultats semblables à un sondage mené auprès de contrôleurs canadiens et lors d'études en laboratoire. Les enregistrements polysomnographiques réalisés lors d'une étude subséquente de Rhodes et coll. (1996) ont révélé, chez les contrôleurs travaillant de nuit, une piètre qualité du sommeil et une structure du sommeil caractéristique des personnes privées de sommeil. Comparant les manifestations physiologiques du stress, Melton, McKenzie, Polis et coll. (1973) ont remarqué que le sommeil diurne des contrôleurs était moins réparateur que le sommeil nocturne. Stoynev et Minkova (1998) sont les seuls à n'avoir observé aucune différence entre les évaluations subjectives du sommeil se rapportant aux trois quarts de travail successifs.

La fatigue, la somnolence, le creux circadien, le manque de sommeil, la faible charge de travail et les faibles niveaux d'éclairement sont autant de facteurs qui expliquent la baisse de performance et de vigilance pendant la nuit (Benson, 1970; Costa, 1993, 1999; Grandjean et coll., 1971; Luna, 1997; Rhodes et coll., 1996; Wickens et coll., 1997).

Ainsi, des études révèlent que les résultats à diverses épreuves psychométriques se rapportant aux tâches de contrôle de la circulation aérienne sont particulièrement faibles vers la fin du service de nuit (Della Rocco et Cruz, 1996; Della Rocco, Cruz et Schroeder, 1995; Luna, 1997; Rhodes et coll., 1994, 1996; Schroeder et coll., 1995). Quelques chercheurs soulignent toutefois que si la fatigue explique les résultats plus faibles aux tests, la baisse de performance à ces tests ne reflète pas nécessairement le rendement au travail des contrôleurs (Luna, 1997; Rhodes et coll., 1994; Schroeder et coll., 1995). Encore que la fatigue influe vraisemblablement sur le rendement au travail, puisqu'un plus grand nombre d'incidents ont été observés la nuit chez d'autres groupes de travailleurs postés (Costa, 1999). Compte tenu de la gravité des conséquences pouvant résulter d'erreurs de la part des contrôleurs, la baisse de performance observée la nuit soulève de vives inquiétudes quant à la sûreté du contrôle de la circulation aérienne.

Les quarts de nuit sont préoccupants, mais les quarts de jour présentent aussi leur part de problèmes. Les contrôleurs se sentent plus fatigués avant de prendre un service de jour qu'avant de prendre un service de nuit (Melton, 1985). En effet, le service de jour entraîne une perte de sommeil, car les contrôleurs qui doivent se présenter au travail de grand matin ne se couchent pas nécessairement plus tôt la veille, ce qui fait que leur sommeil est écourté (par rapport au sommeil pris avant les quarts de soir ou pendant les périodes de repos) (Costa, 1999; Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz et Schroeder, 1995; Rhodes et coll., 1994, 1996; Saldivar et coll., 1977). Cette situation est encore plus difficile pour les nombreux contrôleurs qui demeurent loin de leur travail. Par exemple, les contrôleurs qui travaillent dans la région métropolitaine de Toronto doivent souvent faire un trajet d'une heure pour se rendre au travail, comparativement à 10 ou 15 minutes pour les contrôleurs de Moncton ou de Gander (Rhodes et coll., 1996). Les travailleurs postés ont de la difficulté à se coucher tôt même lorsqu'ils savent qu'ils doivent se lever tôt le lendemain, parce qu'il y a une période, avant l'heure habituelle à laquelle on s'endort, où l'horloge biologique semble repousser le sommeil (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995a; Folkard et Barton, 1993).

Ainsi, même le jour, la performance est plus faible au début de la période de service et s'améliore pendant la journée (Rhodes et coll., 1996). Considérant le nombre relativement élevé d'accidents à survenir aux petites heures du matin chez les autres groupes de travailleurs (Costa, 1999), la sûreté opérationnelle est probablement compromise par la fatigue et la baisse de performance observées au début des quarts commençant au petit jour.

2.2.2 Organisation temporelle du travail posté

Aux problèmes inhérents aux quarts de jour et de nuit s'ajoutent ceux engendrés par l'organisation temporelle des quarts de travail. De fait, les horaires sont un sujet très émotif et une source de vive tension entre les cadres et les employés des services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne (Hopkin, 1982, 1995; Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986).

Le débat touchant l'organisation temporelle du travail posté dure depuis près de trois décennies et la solution tout à fait satisfaisante reste encore à élaborer.

Comme on peut le voir au tableau 1, divers types d'horaires permettent d'assurer jour et nuit, sans interruption, les services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne. En vertu de l'horaire permanent, le contrôleur effectue toujours le même quart. L'horaire à rotation lente est une variante de l'horaire permanent selon lequel le contrôleur effectue le même quart pendant cinq périodes de travail consécutives, puis change de quart la semaine suivante. D'autres horaires dits à rotation rapide comportent des changements de quart pendant la semaine de travail. La configuration exacte des horaires peut varier, mais en gros, il existe deux grands systèmes de rotation rapide : 1) la rotation vers l'avant et 2) la rotation vers l'arrière. Selon le système de rotation vers l'avant (ou dans le sens des aiguilles d'une montre), le travailleur commence sa semaine par un quart de jour, pour passer, dans la même semaine, à un quart d'aprèsmidi, et finalement, à un quart de nuit. Selon le système de rotation vers l'arrière (ou en sens inverse des aiguilles d'une montre), la semaine de travail commence par un quart d'après-midi, se poursuit par un quart de matin et se termine par un quart de nuit (Luna, 1997; Tepas et Monk, 1987). Au tableau 1, les deux jours de repos coïncident avec la fin de semaine, ce qui est fidèle à la réalité des contrôleurs américains.

Au Canada, les horaires des contrôleurs diffèrent de ceux qui ont cours aux États-Unis. La convention collective de 1999 entre Nav Canada et l'Association canadienne du contrôle du trafic aérien (ACCTA) établit quatre types de cycles de travail différents, tel qu'illustré au tableau 2. Selon cette convention, les périodes de repos doivent compter un minimum de trois jours consécutifs. De plus, un quart de travail ne devrait pas commencer «dans les dix heures qui suivent la fin du quart précédent de l'employé» et ne devrait pas durer plus de 11 heures (ACCTA/Nav Canada, 1999). 1

Les services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne utilisent une gamme variée d'horaires, y compris des cycles de cinq jours de travail consécutifs (le changement de quart se fait d'une semaine à l'autre) et un système de rotation rapide vers l'arrière désigné le «2-2-1». Ces horaires ont été analysés et comparés eu égard à leurs effets sur la fatigue, le sommeil, la performance et le stress. Compte tenu des nombreuses difficultés, notamment méthodologiques (taille restreinte des échantillons, non-équivalence des groupes ou des quarts), associées à la réalisation de ces études, les analyses statistiques que l'on peut en tirer ont une portée limitée. Il est néanmoins possible de discerner, dans la masse de données accumulées, certaines tendances vérifiables dans toutes les études, et d'observer que chaque horaire, comme on le verra ci-après, comporte ses faiblesses.

D'autres articles de la convention collective, par exemple Heures supplémentaires, Jours fériés, Dotation, peuvent influencer les horaires de travail. Le lecteur est prié de consulter la convention collective pour une description plus détaillée des conditions qui peuvent affecter les horaires de travail.

Tableau 1 Exemples d'horaires de quarts en vigueur dans certains services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne

Horaire	Jour 1	Jour 2	Jour 3	Jour 4	Jour 5	Jour 6	Jour 7
Horaire pen	manent:						
Semaine 1 : 5 jours	7 h - 15 h						
Semaine 2: 5 jours	7 h - 15 h	repos	repos				
Semaine 3: 5 jours (etc.)	7 h - 15 h						
Rotation len	ite :						
Semaine 1 : 5 jours	7 h - 15 h						
Semaine 2: 5 soirs	15 h - 23 h	repos	repos				
Semaine 3 :	23 h - 7 h						
Rotation rap	oide :						
Vers l'arrière	15 h - 23 h	15 h - 23 h	7 h - 15 h	7 h - 15 h	23 h - 7 h	repos	repos
Vers l'avant	7 h - 15 h	7 h - 15 h	15 h - 23 h	15 h - 23 h	23 h - 7 h	repos	repos

Tableau 2 Cycles de travail des contrôleurs aériens canadiens

	Horaire 1	Horaire 2	Horaire 3	Horaire 4
Première	6 jours de travail –			
semaine	4 jours de repos	4 jours de repos	5 jours de repos	3 jours de repos
Deuxième	6 jours de travail –			
semaine	4 jours de repos	3 jours de repos	3 jours de repos	3 jours de repos
Troisième	5 jours de travail –			
semaine	3 jours de repos	4 jours de repos	3 jours de repos	5 jours de repos

La source principale d'inquiétude concernant les horaires permanents ou les rotations lentes est le fait que les gens effectuent plusieurs services de nuit consécutifs. On croit généralement qu'au bout de cinq quarts de nuit consécutifs, l'organisme est adapté à la vie noctume. Mais cette hypothèse n'a pu être confirmée par la recherche. En effet, des études révèlent que le rythme circadien des travailleurs de nuit oeuvrant dans divers secteurs d'activité a tendance à se déphaser mais ne s'ajuste jamais parfaitement au travail de nuit, même après des périodes prolongées de travail noctume (Benson, 1970; Costa, 1999; Luna, 1997; Tepas et Monk, 1987; Wickens et coll., 1997). Aussi, le fait de travailler plusieurs nuits consécutives perturbe la vie sociale des

travailleurs postés, qui ont tendance à adopter un rythme diurne pendant leurs jours de repos, entravant ainsi le processus d'adaptation (Luna, 1997; Tepas et Monk, 1987).

Des périodes prolongées de quarts de nuit comportent un autre inconvénient, comme l'ont observé Rhodes et coll. (1996). En effet, ils ont constaté que les contrôleurs qui travaillaient cinq quarts de nuit consécutifs accumulaient un déficit de sommeil de plus de 10 heures, en raison de la brièveté et de la piètre qualité du sommeil qu'ils prenaient le jour. Les niveaux de mélatonine de ces contrôleurs indiquaient que leur rythme circadien ne s'était jamais synchronisé avec l'horaire de nuit. Melton et Bartanowicz (1986) ont eux aussi conclu que cinq nuits de travail consécutives ne sont pas assez pour permettre une adaptation du rythme circadien, d'où l'accumulation de fatigue causée par le sommeil inadéquat pris le jour. De plus, les contrôleurs qui travaillent cinq nuits consécutives disent avoir besoin de tout le week-end pour récupérer, et ils ont tendance à être fatigués au début de leur nouveau cycle de travail (Melton, McKenzie, Smith et coll., 1973; Saldivar et coll., 1977). Même si le nombre de quarts de nuit consécutifs permettait une adaptation du rythme circadien, il reste que le travail de nuit, dans le cas des contrôleurs, comporte trop d'inconvénients. Parmi les plus importants, mentionnons la baisse de performance associée à la faible charge de travail la nuit (Luna, 1997; Luna et coll., 1994, 1997; Melton, 1985; Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986); l'ennui, qui génère la fatigue et finit par miner la motivation (Luna et coll., 1994); et la rareté des contacts avec la famille, les amis et les collègues (Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986; Rhodes et coll., 1994; Wickens et coll., 1997).

Contrairement aux horaires permanents et aux systèmes de rotation lente, les systèmes de rotation rapide permettent de respecter le rythme circadien favorable à l'activité diurne, tel qu'en témoignent diverses variables comme la température corporelle, les niveaux de mélatonine ou la pression artérielle (Costa, 1993; Luna et coll., 1994; Rhodes et coll., 1996; Stoynev, Minkova, 1998). Le fait de toujours effectuer des cycles diurnes empêche la désynchronisation des divers rythmes biologiques, et les contrôleurs atteignent la crête de leur rythme circadien pendant les quarts de jour et d'après-midi, aux heures où le trafic aérien s'intensifie.

Les études portant sur les horaires tournants de contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne traitent surtout du système de rotation vers l'arrière dit «2-2-1». L'aménagement précis de cet horaire varie, mais il comporte habituellement deux quarts de soir, suivis de deux quarts de jour, suivis à leur tour d'un quart de nuit. L'avantage de cet horaire est qu'il comporte un seul quart de nuit, plutôt que cinq quarts de nuit consécutifs, une caractéristique appréciée par de nombreux contrôleurs (Schroeder et coll., 1995). Toutefois, la durée des périodes de repos entre deux quarts de travail consécutifs varie de 14 à 8 heures, comparativement aux 16 heures habituelles. Vues sous l'angle de la fatigue, on peut craindre que ces courtes périodes de repos ne donnent pas aux contrôleurs suffisamment de temps de sommeil entre leurs quarts de travail pour récupérer pleinement. Or, l'absence de récupération complète peut nuire à la performance.

Les recherches portant sur le sommeil des contrôleurs travaillant selon un horaire 2-2-1 ont révélé une diminution constante de la durée du sommeil pendant la semaine de travail (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco et Cruz, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz, et Schroeder, 1995; Melton, 1985; Melton et coll., 1975; Melton, McKenzie, Smith et coll., 1973; Rhodes et coll., 1996; Saldivar et coll., 1977; Schroeder et coll., 1995). Cette diminution s'explique facilement par l'heure matinale du début du quart de jour, la rotation rapide, et la période écourtée de sommeil diurne pris avant le quart de nuit (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995b; Della Rocco et Cruz, 1995b; Della Rocco, Cruz, et Schroeder, 1995; Rhodes et coll., 1996; Saldivar et coll., 1977; Schroeder et coll., 1995). Comme on l'a déjà souligné, tant la quantité que la qualité du sommeil pris avant le service de nuit laissent à désirer. L'horaire 2-2-1 accentue ce phénomène, car le contrôleur a moins de temps pour dormir avant son unique service de nuit qu'avant chaque quart d'un cycle de services de nuit (Melton et coll., 1975; Melton, McKenzie, Smith et coll., 1973; Saldivar et coll., 1977). Selon Melton, McKenzie, Smith et coll. (1973), certains contrôleurs affectés à un horaire 2-2-1 aiment faire un petit somme avant leur quart de nuit, de façon à être juste assez fatigués le matin pour bien dormir et se réadapter à la vie diurne normale.

L'horaire 2-2-1 est-il plus dommageable que les autres sur le plan du manque de sommeil, de la fatigue et de la baisse de performance? Certains chercheurs ont tenté de répondre à cette question. Parmi eux, Saldivar et coll. (1977) ont comparé un horaire rotatif constitué de cinq quarts consécutifs avec l'horaire 2-2-1 et ils n'ont pas observé de différence quant au nombre de commentaires faisant état de somnolence. Pendant leurs cinq jours de travail, les contrôleurs de l'horaire 2-2-1 dormaient moins que ceux de l'horaire permanent, surtout en raison du sommeil écourté précédant le quart de nuit, mais lorsque la comparaison portait sur les sept jours, les écarts n'étaient pas significatifs. Della Rocco et Cruz (1995b) ont obtenu des résultats semblables lors d'une étude en laboratoire des cycles de veille/sommeil. À l'occasion d'une autre étude comparative, Melton et coll. (1975) ont constaté que les contrôleurs affectés à l'horaire 2-2-1 dormaient moins que leurs collègues effectuant cinq quarts consécutifs identiques, mais cet écart tenait surtout au quart de nuit, car lors des quatre autres jours du cycle, les contrôleurs de l'horaire 2-2-1 obtenaient 30 minutes de plus de sommeil que leurs collègues affectés à un horaire permanent.

Lors d'une étude sur le terrain, Cruz et Della Rocco (1995b) ont comparé un horaire 2-2-1 à un horaire de jour normal et n'ont observé aucune différence significative aux chapitres de la quantité de sommeil, de la qualité du sommeil et de la somnolence, avant et après les quarts de travail. Melton, McKenzie, Smith et coll. (1973) ont quant à eux constaté que les contrôleurs travaillant selon un horaire 2-2-1 obtenaient davantage de sommeil que ceux qui effectuaient cinq quarts de nuit consécutifs, mais moins que ceux qui effectuaient cinq quarts de jour de suite. Dans cette même étude, les contrôleurs affectés à l'horaire 2-2-1 se sentaient moins stressés, mais aussi fatigués que les contrôleurs affectés aux horaires permanents de jour ou de nuit. La période de repos écourtée qui accompagne le changement rapide de quart contribue à expliquer la

quantité réduite de sommeil (donc la fatigue plus grande) chez les contrôleurs de l'horaire 2-2-1 que chez ceux de l'horaire permanent (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995a). Dans cette étude, les auteurs ont observé qu'avant un quart de matin, les contrôleurs dormaient souvent moins de six heures, peu importe la nature de leur quart précédent, ce qui donne à penser que certains contrôleurs ne peuvent se coucher tôt, leur horloge biologique refusant d'«avancer».

Quelques études ont examiné la performance des contrôleurs en fonction de l'horaire 2-2-1 à rotation rapide des quarts. Schroeder et coll. (1995) et Della Rocco et Cruz (1995b) n'ont constaté une baisse importante de la performance que pendant le service de nuit. Rhodes et coll. (1996) ont fait la même observation, mais ils ont également noté un niveau de performance plus faible par suite d'un manque de sommeil associé à un changement de quart rapide.

Il est difficile de se prononcer de façon catégorique sur les liens entre l'horaire 2-2-1 et la fatigue, le manque de sommeil et la performance. Comme l'ont fait remarquer Melton et Bartanowicz (1986), un des avantages de l'horaire 2-2-1 est que quatre quarts sur cinq coïncident avec les heures normales de veille. Mais les habitudes de sommeil sont quand même perturbées par le changement continuel de quart (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995b). Certains contrôleurs s'accommodent mieux que d'autres de cette perturbation de leurs heures de sommeil. Une grande inquiétude subsiste concernant le quart de nuit. Comme on l'a vu plus haut, les contrôleurs ne dorment pas toujours assez avant leur service de nuit, mais la fin de semaine qui suit leur donne la chance de se rattraper. À la longue, l'horaire 2-2-1 pourrait avoir des effets négatifs, puisque des chercheurs ont constaté que les contrôleurs âgés éprouvent davantage de difficulté à s'adapter à l'horaire 2-2-1 et que cet horaire est associé à des indicateurs de maladie (Rhodes et coll., 1994).

Les horaires permanents et les systèmes de rotation vers l'arrière de type 2-2-1 ont suscité beaucoup d'attention à ce jour. Mais il existe d'autres types d'horaires pour lesquels peuvent opter les services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne. Mentionnons le système de rotation vers l'avant, selon lequel le contrôleur commence son cycle de travail par des quarts de jour, puis passe à des quarts de soir, et enfin à des quarts de nuit. À l'instar de la rotation rapide vers l'arrière, la rotation rapide vers l'avant minimise les perturbations du rythme circadien, qui favorise l'activité diurne (Stoynev et Minkova, 1998). Certains auteurs font observer que, règle générale, la rotation vers l'avant respecte mieux le rythme circadien et donne plus de temps de repos entre les quarts, ce qui rendrait ce mode de rotation préférable à la rotation vers l'arrière (Costa, 1999; Barton et Folkard, 1993; Luna, 1997; Tepas et Monk, 1987; Wickens et coll., 1997). Il existe quelques études sur la rotation rapide vers l'avant appliquée aux horaires de contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne. Selon ces études, la rotation vers l'avant ne règle pas le problème des quarts de nuit, ceux-ci étant encore associés à un sommeil réduit, de la fatigue, une somnolence accrue et des périodes de micro-sommeil (Luna et coll., 1994; Stoynev et Minkova, 1998). De plus, les contrôleurs de la USAF travaillant selon un horaire 2-2-2 avec rotation vers l'avant ne dormaient pas et ne faisaient pas de sieste avant leur premier quart de nuit, d'où on peut conclure que, même si cet horaire laisse plus de temps pour dormir entre les quarts, les contrôleurs n'utilisent pas toujours ce temps «à bon escient» (Luna, 1997; Luna et coll., 1994). Les horaires avec rotation vers l'avant donnent peut-être plus de temps pour dormir entre les quarts, mais la durée de la fin de semaine est réduite d'autant (Luna, 1997). Comme la fin de semaine permet en principe de récupérer après le quart de nuit, le fait que ce congé soit écourté augmente la probabilité que les contrôleurs retournent au travail fatigués. Ce système de rotation est donc impopulaire parmi les contrôleurs, qui préfèrent la rotation vers l'arrière, associée à une fin de semaine plus longue (Melton, 1985; Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986; Schroeder et coll., 1995; Wickens et coll., 1997). Les modes de rotation vers l'avant et vers l'arrière n'ont encore fait l'objet d'aucune étude approfondie dans le cas des contrôleurs et même si la rotation vers l'avant semble plus avantageuse, la question reste à examiner en détail (Luna, 1997; Stoynev et Minkova, 1998).

2.3 Charge de travail et durée de la tâche

Une même charge de travail ne représente pas la même charge mentale pour tous les contrôleurs, celle-ci variant selon l'expérience, les habiletés, la motivation, l'état de fatigue et les habiletés d'adaptation de chacun (Hopkin, 1995; Wickens et coll., 1997). Mais une lourde charge de travail, associée à un trafic aérien intense, finit inévitablement par engendrer de la fatigue, née de l'effort soutenu que doit déployer le contrôleur (Meyer, 1973). Or, on ne peut déployer tout l'effort nécessaire pour s'acquitter d'une charge de travail imposante que pendant une période limitée, au delà de laquelle la performance décline. Lors d'une étude de simulation des tâches du contrôleur de la circulation aérienne, plus le temps passait, plus les périodes d'inattention étaient fréquentes et plus le temps de réaction associé aux tâches de surveillance complexes s'allongeait, surtout dans le cas où la charge de travail était importante (Schroeder et coll., 1994; Stern et coll., 1994; Thackray et Touchstone, 1985; Thackray, Touchstone et Bailey, 1978). Les baisses de performance et les fluctuations de la vigilance associées à la durée de la tâche sont accentuées lorsque le contrôleur n'a pas suffisamment dormi ou qu'il a mal dormi (Meyer, 1973).

Il est évident d'associer les périodes de trafic aérien intense aux périodes de charge de travail importante. Mais un faible trafic peut également représenter une difficulté pour le contrôleur. En effet, les tâches de contrôle de la circulation aérienne comportent énormément de surveillance sur des écrans. Demeurer longtemps attentif est difficile et ennuyeux, et entraîne une baisse de la vigilance et de la motivation (Luna et coll., 1994; Schroeder et coll., 1994; Wickens et coll., 1997). Cela a été confirmé par les commentaires formulés par des participants à une étude de Schroeder et coll. (1994), qui se sont déclarés en proie à davantage de fatigue, d'ennui et d'irritabilité, dans des périodes de faible activité.

2.4 Charge de travail et automatisation

Le trafic aérien s'accroît de jour en jour dans le monde, alourdissant la charge de travail des contrôleurs. Avec l'apparition des nouvelles technologies, l'automatisation du contrôle de la circulation aérienne a souvent été considérée comme un moyen de réduire la charge de travail des contrôleurs et d'accroître la capacité d'accueil des aéroports (Hopkin, 1995, 1999; Wickens et coll., 1997). Mais on ne connaît pas encore très bien tous les effets de l'automatisation sur les processus cognitifs et la performance des contrôleurs (FAA, 1990; Garland, Stein, Muller, 1999). Beaucoup croient que l'automatisation de certaines fonctions confine le contrôleur à un rôle de surveillance (Thackray et Touchstone, 1985; Thackray et coll., 1978). Or, l'automatisation ne réduit pas nécessairement la charge de travail du contrôleur, car toute tâche nécessitant de la vigilance est exigeante, et le fait d'accorder une attention soutenue engendre de la fatigue (Hopkin, 1995; Stern et coll., 1994; Wickens et coll., 1997). Gaines (1993) a également noté que le fait de confiner les contrôleurs à une tâche de surveillance risque de leur faire «perdre la main» (p.17). L'automatisation risque également d'alourdir la charge de travail du contrôleur en exigeant de lui des connaissances plus poussées et un plus grand effort mental pour comprendre et interpréter le fonctionnement et les sorties de données du système (FAA, 1990, p. A-57). D'où la nécessité de bien penser et planifier l'automatisation du contrôle de la circulation aérienne, pour en tirer le maximum d'avantages.

2.5 Modes de vie, traits de personnalité et différences interindividuelles

Il a été démontré que certains aspects du mode de vie influent sur la capacité d'une personne de résister à la fatigue. Ainsi, les contrôleurs qui ont des habitudes de vie saines, c'est-à-dire qui font de l'exercice, qui s'alimentent de façon équilibrée, qui ont de bonnes habitudes de sommeil et qui savent gérer leur temps résistent mieux que les autres à la fatigue (Costa, 1999; Meyer, 1973; Rhodes et coll., 1994). Il semble qu'un contrôleur en bonne forme physique est moins fatigué et a une meilleure performance pendant un quart de nuit (Costa, 1999). À l'inverse, on observe davantage d'indicateurs de maladie chez un contrôleur qui fume, qui consomme de grandes quantités d'alcool et de café, et qui prend des somnifères (Rhodes et coll., 1994).

Il devient de plus en plus difficile avec l'âge de s'adapter au travail posté et de résister au stress et à la fatigue. Une étude a notamment révélé que les contrôleurs âgés sont davantage stressés, qu'ils dorment moins et que leur rythme circadien s'adapte moins facilement aux heures de sommeil changeantes (Costa, 1999; Costa et coll., 1995; Meyer, 1973; Rhodes et coll., 1994, 1996). Si l'âge influe sur l'adaptabilité du rythme circadien, il en va autrement du sexe : hommes et femmes sont aussi vulnérables les uns que les autres à la fatigue (Costa, 1999).

La personnalité et le comportement sont des facteurs qui influent également sur la susceptibilité à la fatigue. Le fait, pour un contrôleur, d'être du type à être actif plutôt le matin ou plutôt le soir peut influer sur sa performance et sur son adaptation aux différents quarts de travail. Les gens qui sont plutôt actifs le matin aiment se coucher tôt et se lever tôt, tandis que les gens qui sont plutôt actifs le soir préfèrent au contraire se coucher et se lever tard. Donc, les contrôleurs du type «matin» ont plus de difficulté à s'adapter au travail de nuit, mais sont plus vigilants aux petites heures du matin, tandis que les contrôleurs du type «soip», comme on peut s'y attendre, s'accommodent plus facilement des services de soir et de nuit (Costa, 1999; Costa et coll., 1995; Rhodes et coll., 1994). En général, les personnes qui ont tendance à être plus actives le soir s'adaptent mieux au travail posté, car on observe mez elles moins de perturbations du sommeil et moins d'indicateurs physiologiques associés au stress (Costa, 1993, 1999). Les contrôleurs dont le rythme circadien est stable sont mieux en mesure de résister aux perturbations du sommeil et à la fatigue, tandis que ceux qui ont des habitudes de sommeil rigides ou qui ont beaucoup de mal à combattre la somnolence sont plus sensibles à la fatigue (Costa, 1993, 1999).



3 CONTRE-MESURES POSSIBLES

Il est possible de dégager de l'information exposée dans les sections qui précèdent certaines suggestions et recommandations concernant la lutte contre la fatigue. La présente section propose diverses mesures en ce sens, soit des moyens pour améliorer la vigilance pendant les quarts de nuit et des programmes de formation sur la gestion du sommeil et l'adaptation au travail par quarts. Sont également formulées des recommandations concernant les quarts et les horaires, ainsi que des suggestions pour une automatisation plus poussée du travail des contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne.

3.1 Accroissement de la vigilance pendant le service de nuit

Il y a plusieurs façons de lutter contre la fatigue, la somnolence et la baisse de la performance pendant les quarts de nuit. Par exemple, on peut penser à des mesures destinées à améliorer la vigilance. Au nombre de ces mesures, mentionnons un meilleur éclairement du lieu de travail (Costa, 1999; Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995b; Luna, 1997; Luna et coll., 1994). Une faible lumière ambiante contribue en effet à une baisse de la vigilance (Luna, 1997; Rhodes et coll., 1996). Un éclairage vif aide à maintenir la vigilance et à retarder l'endormissement (Costa, 1999; Luna et coll., 1994) tout en améliorant le degré de vigilance (Boivin, 1997). Il y a lieu de déterminer avec soin le niveau d'éclairement propre à faciliter la surveillance sur les écrans radar (Luna, 1997; Hopkin, 1995; Rhodes et coll., 1996).

La sieste constitue une autre stratégie possible pour accroître la vigilance. De nombreux auteurs estiment qu'une sieste, prise soit avant soit pendant le quart de travail, aide à prévenir la somnolence et à maintenir la vigilance pendant le service de nuit (Costa, 1993, 1999; Luna, 1997; Luna et coll., 1994). La sieste telle qu'appliquée aux services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne avait reçu peu d'attention jusqu'à récemment. Rhodes et coll. (1996) ont noté les bienfaits de la sieste et ont recommandé que soit menée une simulation où la sieste ferait partie des conditions de travail des contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne, de façon que l'on puisse en évaluer pleinement les effets sur la vigilance et la performance. Della Rocco, Cruz et Schroeder (1995) ont prévu une étude devant déterminer l'efficacité des siestes à pallier les effets indésirables du service de nuit. Bien qu'il préconise la sieste comme moyen d'accroître la vigilance pendant le service de nuit, Luna (1997) fait toutefois remarquer qu'une telle stratégie pose le problème de l'inertie du sommeil, qui correspond à une période de transition pendant laquelle on n'est pas complètement réveillé ni tout à fait fonctionnel. Il est possible de prévenir ce problème en prenant la sieste au moment approprié (avant de prendre son service) et en se donnant assez de temps pour bien se réveiller après la sieste.

Plusieurs auteurs semblent penser que la prise de mélatonine pourrait aider les contrôleurs, pendant les quarts de nuit. La mélatonine est une hormone sécrétée par la glande pinéale, qui aurait un rôle à jouer dans la régulation de la veille et du sommeil (Sanders, Chaturvedi et Hordinsky, 1998). Le fait de prendre de la mélatonine avant

d'aller au lit aide à s'endormir et améliore la qualité du sommeil, tout en atténuant la fatigue et la somnolence au réveil (Costa, 1999). La mélatonine exerce un puissant effet sur le rythme circadien et elle contribue à améliorer la performance des travailleurs de nuit (Luna, 1997). Elle pourrait être utile aux contrôleurs qui effectuent plusieurs quarts de nuit de suite, mais elle n'est pas recommandée à ceux dont l'horaire comporte des changements rapides de quart, lesquels visent précisément à empêcher le déphasage du rythme circadien (Luna, 1997). Sans compter le risque d'effets résiduels pouvant causer de la somnolence et une baisse de la performance. Il semble donc crucial, dans le cas des contrôleurs postés, de choisir le bon moment pour l'administration de la mélatonine (Sanders et coll., 1998). La mélatonine semble représenter une arme prometteuse pour lutter contre la fatigue, mais il y a peu de temps qu'on s'y intéresse et il reste beaucoup à apprendre sur son efficacité, ses effets secondaires et ses effets à long terme sur la santé, de même que sur ses interactions avec les autres médicaments (Sanders et coll., 1998).

Il existe d'autres moyens de maintenir la vigilance des travailleurs de nuit. Boire du café est une stratégie courante qui aide à maintenir la vigilance et la performance, et s'il est pris tôt, en début de service, il n'empêche pas l'apparition du sommeil, après le quart de travail (Luna, 1997; Luna et coll., 1994). Mais il n'est pas bon de boire trop de café, en raison de ses effets néfastes sur l'appareil digestif (Costa, 1999). Comme on l'a dit plus tôt, le trafic aérien est habituellement peu intense pendant la nuit, ce qui exige une grande vigilance de la part des contrôleurs et contribue à l'ennui et à la fatigue (Rhodes et coll., 1996). Une solution possible à ce problème serait de garder les contrôleurs occupés, par exemple en simulant une circulation aérienne à leur intention, pour autant que cela ne nuise pas aux opérations normales (Rhodes et coll., 1996). Parmi les autres mesures pouvant accroître la vigilance des contrôleurs, on peut penser à l'exercice (mettre à leur disposition un vélo stationnaire ou un rameur), à la conversation ou à des jeux simples avec les collègues (Luna, 1997; Luna et coll., 1994).

3.2 Éducation

Nombreux sont les contrôleurs qui ont de mauvaises habitudes de sommeil et qui ne profitent pas pleinement de leurs périodes de congé pour se reposer (Melton, McKenzie, Smith et coll., 1973; Rhodes et coll., 1996; Saldivar et coll., 1977). Certains contrôleurs qui effectuent un horaire 2-2-1 choisissent de faire une courte sieste avant leur service de nuit, de façon à être assez fatigués pour dormir le matin, tandis que d'autres se couchent tard (surtout après un quart de soir), même s'ils doivent se lever tôt. Ces comportements conduisent au manque de sommeil et à la fatigue. Comme il est impossible d'éliminer le travail posté, il n'y a d'autre choix que de promouvoir de meilleures stratégies pour ceux qui sont affectés à ce type d'horaire. Comme l'a noté Roske-Hofstrand (1995), il importe de sensibiliser davantage les contrôleurs et leurs surveillants à la fatigue, car celle-ci est trop souvent considérée comme un problème personnel plutôt qu'un risque professionnel.

L'élaboration de programmes de formation sur la «gestion» du travail par quarts et sur l'hygiène du sommeil, destinés aux contrôleurs et aux cadres, est une façon de sensibiliser les gens à la fatigue tout en les aidant à lutter contre celle-ci, en leur enseignant les stratégies appropriées (Della Rocco et Cruz, 1995b, 1996; Della Rocco, Cruz et Schroeder, 1995; Rhodes et coll., 1996). Selon Rhodes et coll. (1996), il serait bon d'offrir les cours sur l'hygiène du sommeil aux familles des contrôleurs, afin qu'elles soient elles aussi sensibles au problème de la fatigue. Les stratégies pour favoriser le sommeil constituent un des grands thèmes à aborder : comment créer un environnement favorable au sommeil, gestes et habitudes qui préparent au sommeil, meilleures heures pour dormir le jour, techniques de relaxation utiles avant d'aller au lit (Rhodes et coll., 1996). Cette formation est aussi une excellente occasion d'insister sur l'importance d'habitudes saines, comme l'exercice et une alimentation équilibrée, et d'expliquer les effets de l'alcool et des médicaments. La formation pourrait aussi porter sur d'autres sujets reliés à la fatigue, comme les effets du rythme circadien, l'influence des caractéristiques personnelles sur la facilité d'adaptation au travail par quarts (âge, type matin/soir, stabilité du rythme circadien), et les stratégies de gestion de la charge de travail (Gaines, 1993).

3.3 Atténuation de la fatigue associée au manque de sommeil

Les quarts débutant de grand matin engendrent un manque de sommeil. Le contrôleur doit se lever tôt, même s'il n'a pas pu se coucher tôt la veille, son horloge biologique refusant d'entendre raison (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995a; Folkard et Barton, 1993). Il pourrait être utile de faire commencer le quart de jour plus tard le matin de façon à pallier ce problème du sommeil écourté (Cruz et Della Rocco, 1995a, 1995b). Certains services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne sont fermés la nuit, mais ouvrent très tôt le matin. Il n'est donc pas toujours possible de retarder le début du quart de jour. De plus, en décalant le quart de jour, on doit aussi décaler le quart de nuit, et ce sont des contrôleurs fatigués qui doivent alors prendre en charge le trafic intense du matin. Pour qu'il en soit autrement, il faudrait que l'équipe de nuit passe la main à l'équipe du matin pendant la période de pointe, ce qui accroîtrait les risques d'erreur, car on sait que les incidents sont plus fréquents en début de service, alors que les contrôleurs sont en train d'informer leurs collègues qui prennent leur place de l'état de la situation (Stager et Hameluck, 1988). Une autre avenue possible serait de remanier le régime de travail, ce qui est rarement une mince tâche (voir la section 3.4).

3.4 Nouvelle organisation temporelle du travail posté

L'organisation des quarts de travail des contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne est une question éminemment émotive, que les contrôleurs et les cadres ne voient pas toujours du même oeil (Hopkin, 1982). Les discussions sur les cycles de travail optimaux se poursuivent depuis le début des années 1970, et n'ont débouché pour l'instant sur aucune solution satisfaisante (Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986). Les travaux de recherche ne permettent pas non plus de tirer de conclusion claire; certains résultats sont

contradictoires et il n'est pas rare que les études soient entachées de vices méthodologiques. Il est toutefois possible de dégager certaines tendances et d'en déduire quelques lignes directrices concernant l'établissement des horaires.

D'après les données colligées et rapportées dans les sections précédentes, les horaires permanents et les horaires à rotation lente comportent peu d'avantages pour les quarts de nuit et nuisent de plusieurs façons à la performance et à la sûreté des opérations. On doit mettre en doute le bien-fondé de ce type d'horaire pour les services de contrôle de la circulation aérienne, en raison de ses effets sur la sécurité et des nombreux faits qui militent en faveur d'autres types d'horaires pour les contrôleurs. Compte tenu de la fatigue, du manque de sommeil, de la perturbation du rythme circadien, de la baisse de la performance associée à la faible charge de travail et des obstacles à la vie sociale induits par le travail nocturne, le nombre de services de nuit consécutifs devrait être réduit au minimum (Costa, 1999; Hopkin, 1995; Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986; Rhodes et coll., 1994, 1996; Wickens et coll., 1997).

Les systèmes de rotation rapide sont une façon de parer les problèmes engendrés par les horaires permanents ou les systèmes de rotation lente. Les cycles à rotation rapide comportent moins de services de nuit, seulement un ou deux à la fin de la semaine. Mais de tels horaires, notamment la rotation 2-2-1 vers l'arrière, ne sont pas sans inconvénient : semaine de travail comprimée et réduction du temps de repos entre quarts, notamment lors d'un changement de quart rapide, qui entraînent un manque de sommeil et une baisse de la performance (Della Rocco et Cruz, 1995b; Rhodes et coll., 1996; Schroeder et coll., 1995). Ce genre d'horaire devrait être assorti de stratégies pour prévenir le manque de sommeil et accroître la vigilance. Selon certains auteurs, il est préférable que les changements de quart se fassent vers l'avant plutôt que vers l'arrière, de façon que les contrôleurs disposent de plus de temps pour se reposer entre leurs services. Mais Cruz et Della Rocco (1995a) ont noté que le sens de la rotation n'est peut-être pas aussi important que la durée du repos entre les services. Ainsi, une refonte des horaires qui accorderait des périodes de repos plus longues, de 10 à 13 heures plutôt que 8 heures lors du changement rapide de quart, atténuerait le manque de sommeil et améliorerait la performance.

Le sens de la rotation est une question délicate. La rotation vers l'avant serait préférable à la rotation vers l'arrière parce qu'elle perturberait moins le rythme circadien (Costa, 1999; Luna, 1997; Tepas et Monk, 1987). Toutefois, ces horaires donnent une fin de semaine écourtée, conséquence que la plupart des contrôleurs s'accordent à honnir. Dans les faits, il existe très peu d'horaires utilisant la rotation vers l'avant (Luna, 1997; Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986). Si un tel type d'horaire devait être envisagé, il faudrait, pour que les contrôleurs l'acceptent, qu'il soit aménagé de façon à assurer des fins de semaine d'une durée raisonnable (Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986).

Comme le laissent penser les observations ci-dessus, beaucoup de contrôleurs apprécient particulièrement les horaires à rotation vers l'arrière en raison des longues

fins de semaine qu'ils leur ménagent (Luna, 1997; Melton, 1985; Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986; Hopkin, 1982, 1995; Wickens et coll., 1997). Mais, comme l'ont fait remarquer Della Rocco et Cruz (1995b), certains contrôleurs ont une aversion pour les cycles avec rotation vers l'arrière du type 2-2-1, peut-être parce qu'ils éprouvent plus de difficultés à s'adapter à la perturbation de leurs heures de sommeil et au manque de sommeil. On peut donc penser que, lorsque cela est possible, les régimes de travail devraient comporter plusieurs horaires différents parmi lesquels pourraient choisir les contrôleurs. Certains auteurs estiment que les contrôleurs devraient avoir leur mot à dire dans l'attribution des horaires. Cela accroîtrait leur satisfaction au travail et, par conséquent, leur motivation, et ils seraient plus en mesure de maîtriser la fatigue et le stress associés à un horaire qu'ils auraient choisi (Hopkin, 1982, 1995; Melton, 1985; Melton et Bartanowicz, 1986; Meyer, 1973). De fait, Hopkin (1982) a noté que certains contrôleurs s'adaptent à n'importe quel horaire, pourvu qu'il leur paraisse «acceptable». Ainsi, lors de la confection et de l'attribution des horaires, toutes les considérations mentionnées plus tôt concernant le sommeil, le rythme circadien et la santé sont importantes. Melton et Bartanowicz (1986) ont formulé des recommandations convaincantes à cet égard, à savoir que les premiers facteurs à prendre en compte lors de la confection des horaires sont les nécessités du service et la sécurité, et que ceux-ci doivent être raisonnables et pratiques, idée reprise par Hopkin (1995) et Wickens et coll. (1997). Une fois ces critères respectés, il reste à tenter de combler les désirs et les besoins des employés. Lorsqu'on peut agir ainsi, le milieu de travail est plus agréable et moins stressant, et les relations entre les cadres et les employés sont moins tendues.

Le sujet des pauses est intimement lié à celui des horaires. Les contrôleurs doivent prendre des pauses pendant leur service. Comme on l'a vu plus haut, la nature de leur travail suppose une vigilance constante. Comme la vigilance diminue en raison inverse de la fatigue, une pause devrait être permise toutes les deux heures de travail continu (Hopkin, 1995; Roske-Hofstrand, 1995). Pendant leurs pauses, les contrôleurs devraient avoir le temps de quitter leur poste de travail pour passer à la toilette et se rendre dans la salle de repos aménagée sur place, pour prendre une collation ou converser avec des collègues (Hopkin, 1995; Meyer, 1973; Roske-Hofstrand, 1995). Pendant le service de nuit, les pauses sont très importantes, car la faible intensité du trafic engendre une fatigue résultant des efforts déployés pour lutter contre l'ennui. Malheureusement, les effectifs réduits pendant les quarts de nuit empêchent trop souvent les contrôleurs de prendre des pauses (Rhodes et coll., 1994; Roske-Hofstrand, 1995). Les pauses devraient être prises en considération lors de la planification des besoins en personnel, surtout pendant les quarts de nuit (Rhodes et coll., 1996).

D'autres auteurs recommandent de ménager, pendant le service de nuit, une pause suffisamment longue pour que le contrôleur puisse faire une sieste. Costa (1993) a fait une étude à laquelle ont participé des contrôleurs italiens effectuant un horaire 1-1-1 à rotation vers l'arrière, comportant un quart de nuit avec pause de quatre heures. Il semble que ce genre d'horaire facilitait l'adaptation psychophysiologique et aidait à compenser le manque de sommeil. Il s'agit là d'un exemple seulement des multiples

façons d'intégrer à un quart de nuit une pause d'une longueur suffisante pour une sieste. Ainsi, on pourrait penser à des pauses plus courtes, permettant des siestes de 20 à 40 minutes. Comme on l'a déjà mentionné, des études sont en cours pour déterminer la longueur idéale d'une sieste. Il importe de noter qu'un quart de nuit assorti d'une pause permettant une sieste devrait être plus long et entraînerait des modifications aux horaires existants. Mais en prolongeant le quart de nuit, on pourrait faire débuter le quart de jour plus tard le matin, ce qui réglerait le problème du manque de sommeil associé au service débutant de grand matin. Il est possible d'allonger les quarts de nuit, une durée de 8 à 10 heures demeure acceptable, pourvu que des temps d'arrêt soient prévus (Hopkin, 1995). Mais les employés ne voient pas nécessairement d'un bon oeil l'allongement des quarts de travail et il est possible qu'ils résistent à un tel changement. Donc, avant de modifier les horaires pour y insérer des pauses plus longues pendant les quarts de nuit, il faudra réaliser davantage d'études sur les siestes et leur fréquence pendant une période de service.

3.5 Automatisation

À l'intérieur de certaines limites, l'automatisation peut être utile pour alléger la charge de travail. Des systèmes judicieusement conçus peuvent accroître l'efficacité du contrôle de la circulation aérienne, pour autant que l'opérateur humain «puisse avoir la maîtrise et la satisfaction de son travail» (FAA, 1990, p. A-59). Les nouveaux systèmes automatisés devraient être suffisamment souples pour permettre aux contrôleurs de doser eux-mêmes leur charge de travail : une charge trop légère induit l'ennui, tandis qu'une charge modérée favorise la motivation au travail (Hopkin, 1995). Les outils informatiques devraient servir surtout à la collecte de données, laissant aux contrôleurs les tâches les plus intéressantes, qui supposent le traitement d'information et la prise de décisions (Hopkin, 1995; Wickens et coll., 1997). Les nouveaux systèmes informatisés sont donc très prometteurs pour le contrôle de la circulation aérienne, mais il importe de bien évaluer leurs effets sur les opérateurs humains, notamment leur convivialité (Cabon et coll., 1997).

4 CONCLUSION

À l'issue d'une recherche documentaire sur la fatigue chez les contrôleurs de la circulation aérienne, il est permis de penser que les quarts de nuit, le travail posté et la charge de travail constituent des facteurs importants de fatigue chez ces travailleurs. L'automatisation de leur tâche et leur personnalité peuvent aussi influer sur leur degré de fatigue. Certaines contre-mesures possibles à la fatigue ont été examinées. Parmi celles-ci figurent des façons d'accroître la vigilance pendant les quarts de nuit, certains thèmes à inclure aux programmes de formation en santé offerts aux contrôleurs, des moyens d'atténuer le manque de sommeil, des suggestions pour réaménager les quarts de façon à diminuer le manque de sommeil et la fatigue, et des recommandations touchant l'automatisation future du contrôle de la circulation aérienne.

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